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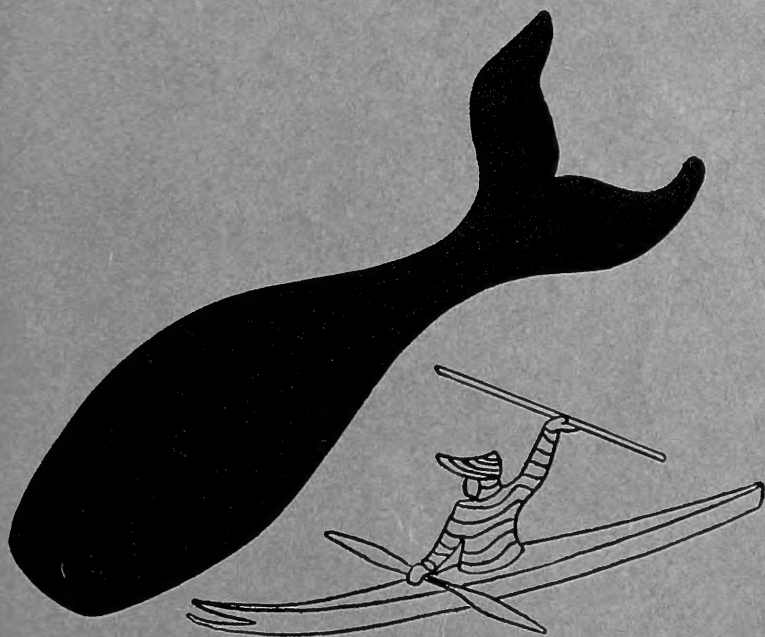


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# ALEUTIAN ISLANDERS

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By George I. Quimby



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# Aleutian Islanders

*Eskimos of the North Pacific*

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Drawings by HELEN Z. QUIMBY



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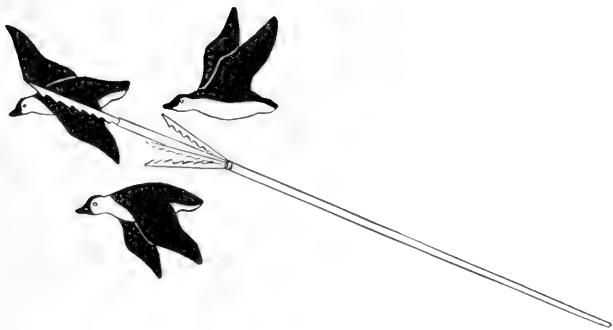
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## The Aleut

### Primitive Hunters of the Northern Sea - - -

The Aleutian Islands were discovered for Russia by the explorers Chirikov and Bering in 1741. In the years following, there were many expeditions to these islands by Russian hunters and traders, most of whom left written descriptions of the geography and people. From their written accounts, as well as those of later missionaries and scientists, I have reconstructed the Aleut mode of life before it was modified by the impact of foreign civilizations.

When the Russians first discovered the Eskimos of the Alaska Peninsula and the Aleutian Islands, they called them "Aleut." From early census reports of the explorers, it is estimated that at the time of their discovery the population numbered about 16,000. The Aleutians, therefore, were one of the most densely populated areas of aboriginal North America.

These bleak and foggy islands lie between Alaska and Siberia. They are rocky, mountainous, and barren. Constant fog, rain, or snow obscures the sun and prevents the growth of trees, yet the abundant moisture encourages the growth of arctic berries, grasses, and creeping willows. Highland areas are typically alpine; the lowlands are wet tundra. But the climate is not truly arctic, for the ice, snow, and long winter of the far north are lacking. The winters are short and mild, but the rest of the year is cold and wet; sunshine is rare and storms are frequent. Yet, in spite of their environment the Aleut had thrived and were prosperous when they were first discovered by the white man.

Food was abundant. There were many kinds of marine mammals: whales, seals, sea lions, walruses, sea otters, and sea cows; there were also many fish, birds, and shellfish; and there was abundant vegetable food, such as roots and berries.

From the raw materials to be found around them the Aleut made their houses, furniture, clothing, ornaments, weapons, tools, utensils, and boats. In fabricating these articles they used various parts of the sea mammals; diverse types of stone; driftwood, which was plentiful; grasses; seaweed; bones, skin, and feathers of birds; clay; and mineral pigments. Thus, all the necessities used in their daily lives were products of their environment, to which they were remarkably well adjusted. They utilized to the utmost the resources of both land and sea.

## People - - -

Like other Indians and Eskimos, the Aleut belong to the Mongoloid class of people. One of the earliest descriptions of their appearance comes from the journal of Georg Wilhelm Steller, a German naturalist who accompanied Bering in 1741. He says (Golder, 1925, p. 96):

"As far as the personal appearance of the islanders is concerned, of whom I counted on the beach nine, mostly young or middle-aged people, they are of medium stature,

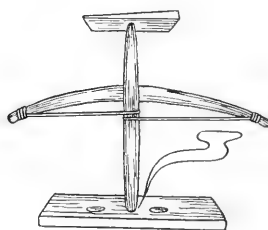
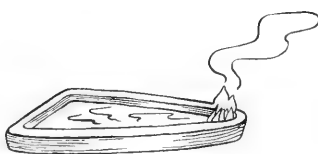
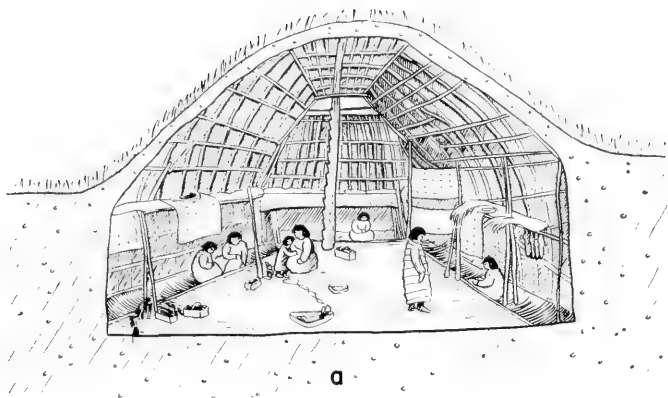


Fig. 1. a, Underground house (after Webber with modifications). b-d, Oil-burning lamps of stone. e, Bow-drill for making fire.

strong and stocky, yet fairly well proportioned, and with very fleshy arms and legs. The hair of the head is glossy black and hangs straight down all around the head. The face is brownish, a little flat and concave. The nose is also flattened, though not particularly broad or large. The eyes are as black as coals, the lips prominent and turned up. In addition they have short necks, broad shoulders, and their body is plump though not big-bellied."

### Language - - -

The Aleut spoke a dialect of the Eskimo language—one of its most divergent forms. The Eskimo dialects of western Alaska, for example, are more closely related to those of distant Hudson's Bay and Greenland than they are to the near-by Aleut dialect.

### Villages - - -

The Aleut usually situated their villages in exposed places near the ocean, preferably on an isthmus or a low promontory or the shore of a bay. Although such village sites were exposed to the wind and cold, they were advantageous in that the villagers were able to see both game and enemies at a distance. For this purpose, watchers were stationed at high points near the village.

### Houses - - -

The houses were built underground and were rectangular in shape, with earth-covered, dome-shaped roofs made of driftwood timbers or whalebone. Some houses had entrance passages at the side, but more often entry was gained through a hole in the roof by means of a notched log used like a ladder. A large underground house (Fig. 1, *a*) described by Captain Cook had two openings in the roof, one an entrance and the other a window or skylight. The floors were covered with matted grass, and each house was provided with a urine trough which was equally

important as a place in which to soak animal skins for tanning. Oil-burning lamps, made of stone, furnished light and heat.

Some of these houses were communal dwellings in which lived a large family group or a number of families. In the big houses there were separate compartments for each family. In addition to the family dwellings, each village had a large community house or meeting place, generally referred to by the Russians as a *kashim*.

Hunters or travelers away from their villages on long trips built a tentlike temporary shelter. One side of the structure was formed by turning a skin-covered canoe on its side; then poles were laid from the top side of the boat to upright posts, which formed the opposing wall; finally, the framework was covered with skins or mats.

### Livelihood - - -

Hunting at sea was the primary means of livelihood for the insular Aleut, but fishing and the gathering of edible plants, birds' eggs, and shellfish were important supplements. The mainland Aleut, with a greater abundance of land animals, laid more emphasis upon hunting on land, but in other respects their means of livelihood were similar to those of the island dwellers. Because of the relatively mild climate, the Aleut had no opportunity to use the ice-hunting techniques of the northern Eskimos.

### Kayaks - - -

Had it not been for the light, skin-covered boat used by the Aleut, hunting at sea would have been impossible. Steller describes Aleut kayaks as follows (Golder, 1925, p. 95):

"The American boats are about two fathoms<sup>1</sup> long, two feet high, and two feet wide on the deck, pointed towards the nose but truncate and smooth in the rear. To judge by appearances, the frame is of sticks fastened together at both ends and spread apart by crosspieces

<sup>1</sup> Twelve feet.

inside. On the outside this frame is covered with skins, perhaps of seals, and colored a dark brown. With these skins the boat is [covered] flat above but sloping towards the keel on the sides; underneath there seems to be affixed a shoe or keel which at the bow is connected with the bow by a vertical piece of wood or bone representing a stem piece, so that the upper surface rests on it. About two arshins<sup>1</sup> from the rear on top is a circular hole, around the whole of which is sewn [a strip made of] whale guts having a hollow hem with a leather string running through it, by means of which it may be tightened or loosened like a purse. When the American has sat down in his boat and stretched out his legs under the deck, he draws this hem together around his body and fastens it with a bow-knot in order to prevent any water from getting in. Behind the paddler on the boat there lie ten or more red-painted sticks, pointed at one end, all made in the same way as the one we secured but for what purpose I cannot imagine, unless perhaps they serve to repair the boat in case the frame should break. The American puts his right hand into the hole of the boat and, holding the paddle in the other hand, carries it thus because of its lightness on to the land anywhere he wants to and back from the land into the water. The paddle consists of a stick a fathom long, at each end provided with a shovel, a hand wide. With this he beats alternately to the right and to the left into the water and thereby propels his boat with great adroitness even among large waves. On the whole, this kind of boat is very little different, if at all, from those used by the Samoyeds and by the Americans in New Denmark."

Some models of kayaks, made by Aleut, are illustrated in Plate 7. These kayaks have been modified by contact with white men, but except for the increased carrying capacity they resemble the earlier forms seen by Steller.

It was sometimes necessary for an Aleut to undertake repairs of his kayak while at sea. Of such repairs, one

<sup>1</sup> Four feet, eight inches.



Russian observer says: "An indispensable object to the bidarka [kayak] is the bladder, i.e., a cleaned sea-lion's or seal's stomach, which is needed in case of capsizing. With the help of the bladder one may put aright the boat, bale out the water, and even repair the cover; in stormy weather the distended bladder keeps the boat afloat, even when it is full of water."

Another method of repairing kayaks at sea entailed the co-operation of two other hunters in kayaks. The injured boat was lifted from the water and placed across the decks of two kayaks which functioned as a kind of floating dry dock. With the injured boat thus out of the water, repairs could be undertaken.

The Aleut hunter took along animal fat to smear over any leaks in the seams of his skin boat. He used hollow bone tubes for sucking water from the kayak bilge. The "red-painted sticks" which Steller observed lying on the kayak deck behind the paddler were not used "to repair the boat" but probably were spears, because Aleut hunters carried many red-painted spears with them in their kayaks.

## Weapons - - -

Hunting weapons of the Aleut were the bow and arrow, spear-thrower, spear, bladder dart, harpoon, lance, and bird spear. Aleut wooden bows were rather short, double-curved, and backed with a twisted sinew spring (Plate 1). Arrows, sometimes feathered, were made of wood, with or without bone foreshafts, and had simple barbed points made of bone, or composite points made of bone to which was fastened a chipped stone blade.

Spear-throwers (Fig. 2, c) were made of wood and usually were painted red. They were about sixteen inches long and three inches wide, with a hand grip and a hole for the forefinger at the near end, a short groove on the upper surface toward the far end, and, at the termination of the groove, an ivory or bone spur for engaging the butt of the spear.

The spear-thrower is something like a rigid sling, if such can be imagined. It acts as an extension of the arm and therefore enables the hunter to throw the spear with greater momentum and force (Figs. 3, 5). Modern experiments have shown that the spear and spear-thrower lacked the accuracy of the bow and arrow, but possessed greater penetrating power, a characteristic of considerable advantage in the hunting of tough-skinned sea mammals. Other advantages of the spear-thrower for use in hunting at sea are its lack of recoil and the fact that it does not require the use of both hands. The Aleut hunter could steady his kayak with the paddle, held in his left hand, while he hurled the spear from the spear-thrower in his right hand.

Different kinds of harpoon darts were thrown with the aid of the spear-thrower. For hunting at sea there were darts with wooden shafts, bone foreshafts, and barbed points of bone or of bone and chipped stone (Fig. 2, *a, b, e*; Plate 5, Figs. 1, 4, 9-13). Similar but larger darts were used in hunting marine mammals on land (Fig. 3). To some of the darts were attached inflated bladders made of the stomachs of sea lions (Fig. 2, *a*). Such bladders hindered the wounded animal in diving and also acted as a drag. A bone mouthpiece for such a bladder is shown in Figure 8, *i*. The dart used for hunting birds consisted of a wooden shaft with a long barbed point made of bone. A short distance beneath the point were three barbed prongs of bone (Fig. 5).

Aleut hunters had two types of harpoons with toggle heads. Each consisted of a wooden shaft with a bone collar and foreshaft of bone and a toggle-type harpoon head made of bone with a blade of ground or chipped stone (Plate 5, Figs. 5-7; Plate 6, Figs. 7-9, 12-17). The harpoon head was held in place by pressure from a line through a hole in the harpoon head.

In one type of harpoon (Fig. 2, *f*), the line from the toggle head was fastened loosely to the wooden shaft. In the other type—a unique one—the line from the harpoon head was fastened through a hole in the foreshaft

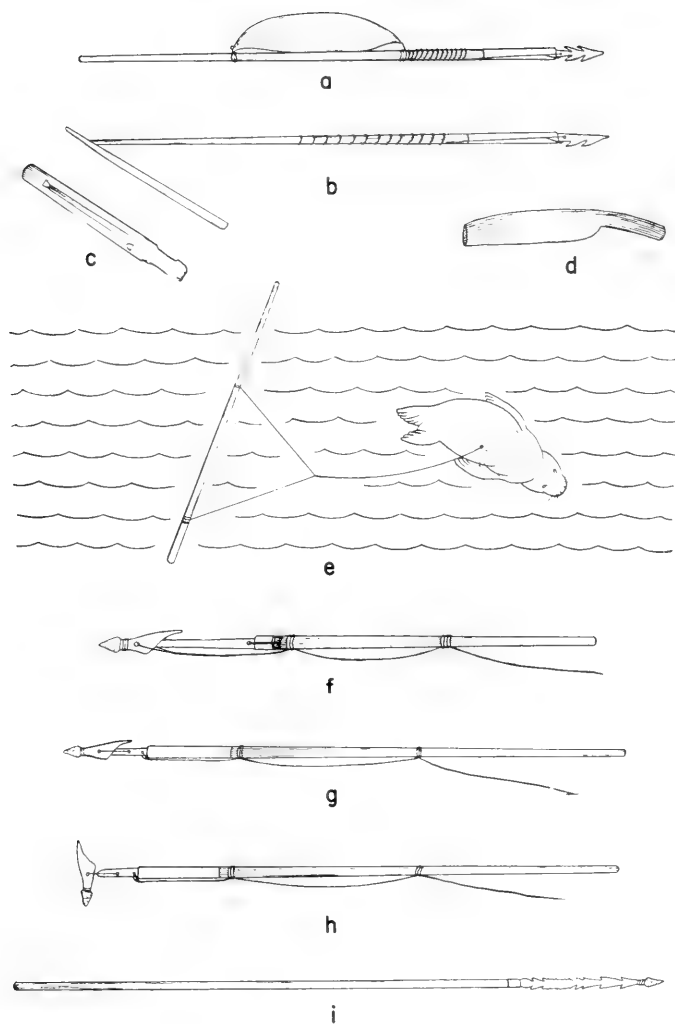


Fig. 2. Aleut hunting weapons: a, Harpoon dart with bladder float. b, Harpoon dart and spear-thrower. c, Spear-thrower. d, Club. e, Harpooned seal. f-h, Harpoons with toggle heads. i, Lance or spear.

(Fig. 2, *g, h*). In either instance the harpoon line was elastic enough or loose enough to allow the toggle head to turn at right angles like a hinge after it had penetrated the animal, thus performing the same function as a barb. Sometimes inflated bladders were tied to the harpoons.

Lances (Fig. 2, *i*) were similar to harpoons and darts, but the heads or points were fixed to the foreshaft and did



Fig. 3. Aleut hunter with large harpoon-dart and spear-thrower.

not become detached upon striking an animal. The animals, wounded and hampered in their movements by darts or harpoons (Fig. 2, *e*), were killed with a lance or perhaps with a bone club (Fig. 2, *d*).

### Whaling - - -

The whaling techniques of the Aleut were radically different from those of the northern Eskimos. Instead of a whaling harpoon, long lines, and floats, the Aleut

used a lance and aconite poison (Heizer, 1943). The lance consisted of a wooden shaft with a bone collar and a barbed bone point. To this point was fastened a blade of chipped stone or obsidian (Fig. 2, *i*), and the aconite poison was smeared on the blade. The poison was made by pounding and grating dried aconite root, which was then steeped in water and kept in a warm place until it fermented.

The Aleut hunter in his kayak approached within striking distance of the whale and threw his poisoned lance. A lance wound was relatively insignificant, but the poison killed the whale, which at some later time was cast up on the shore by the winds and currents. The lance, still sticking in the whale, identified the killer by means of a symbol or ownership-mark engraved on its shaft.

The poisoned flesh and blubber around the wound were removed and discarded, and then the whale was divided among the inhabitants of the village, although certain choice parts went to the owner of the whale, the hunter who had killed it. It seems probable that some of the aconite poison was present in the parts eaten by the Aleut, but probably the amount was not great enough to be dangerous. Also it is possible that the Aleut had individual tolerances obtained by the frequent eating of poisoned whales.

Whale-hunting was the duty and privilege of a guild or cult of whale hunters. Considerable prestige was attached to the cult as well as to the killer of a given whale, for the manufacture and use of aconite poison were the secret property of guild members and were unknown to other Aleut. Many rituals and customs, most of them lost to history, were associated with the whaling cult.

The Aleut method of hunting whales probably was borrowed from Asia. The same techniques were used by natives of Kamchatka and the Kurile Islands.

### Hunting on Land - - -

Under certain conditions weapons usually associated with hunting at sea were used on land; for instance,

marine mammals congregating on the shores or in their islet rookeries were killed by Aleut land hunters who used lances, harpoons, or spear-throwers with darts.

### Hunting Birds - - -

Many kinds of birds were hunted by the Aleut, who, for this purpose, employed the spear-thrower and a special kind of dart. The dart (Fig. 5) was about five or six feet long and tipped with a long bone point with many barbs. A short distance beneath this point were three similar barbed prongs set radially in such a way that they projected from the shaft at an acute angle. When cast at a bird or a flock of birds, this spear was particularly effective, for with its total of four barbed points it became, in a sense, the equivalent of four closely spaced darts flying through the air.

In addition to the special dart, nets on long poles and snares were used for catching birds. It is probable that the bow and arrow was also used for hunting birds on land.

### Fishing - - -

Fish were caught in nets, by hook and line, or with spears. There were two styles of long wooden fish-spears. One type had a single barbed point made of bone (Fig. 4, *d*); the other, a trident form, had a central barbed point of bone and two bone side-prongs, also barbed (Fig. 4, *c*). The Aleut composite fishhook was made of bone and consisted of a barbed hook lashed with sinew to a curved shank (Fig. 4, *a, b, e, g, i*). Lines were made of twisted or braided sinew or twisted fiber. Notched or grooved stones were used as sinkers for nets and fish lines (Fig. 4, *f, h*).

A shellfish rake of wood with a cluster of four bone prongs at one end was used for catching sea urchins in deep water. The prongs were blunt and did not have barbs. Octopuses were caught in shallow waters from skin boats by means of hooks tied to long wooden shafts. The hooks were probably made of bone.

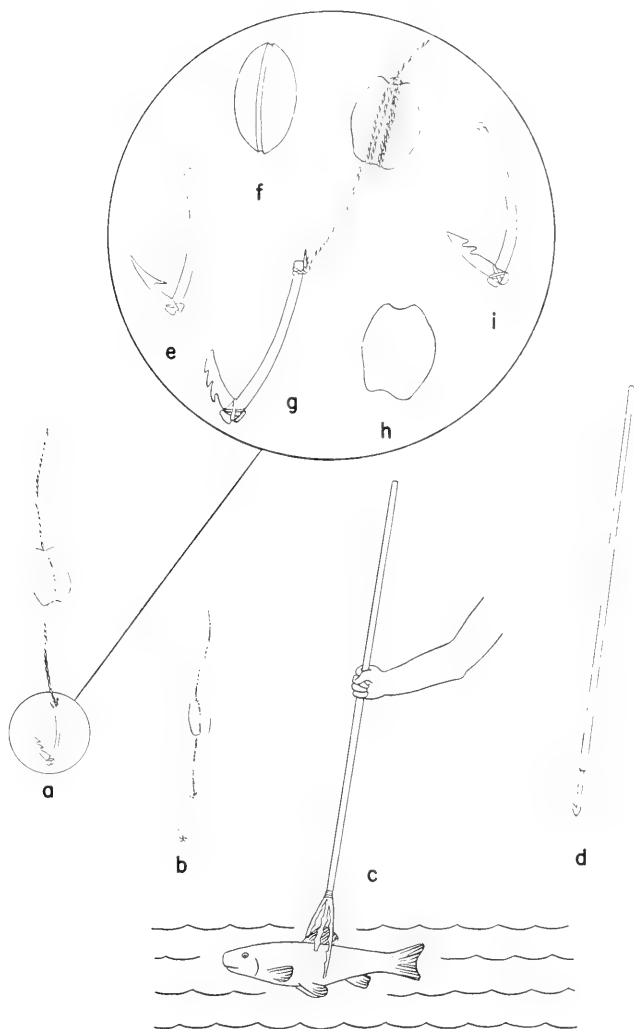


Fig. 4. Aleut fishing equipment: a-b, e, i, Composite fishhooks of bone. c-d, Fish spears. f, Grooved fish-line sinker of stone. g, Hook, line, and sinker. h, Notched fish-line sinker of stone.

## **Food-gathering - - -**

No less important than hunting and fishing were the food-gathering activities of the Aleut. Edible roots were obtained with the aid of a root digger, a pointed bone instrument one or two feet long. All edible grasses, roots, and berries were utilized. When available, birds' eggs were gathered in considerable quantities. But of all gathered foods, shellfish seem to have been most abundant. The important shellfish were sea urchins, snails, and clams.

The Aleut ate most of their food raw. Some meat was roasted and doubtless some was cooked in wooden vessels by means of "stone boiling;" that is, by dropping heated stones into the water until the boiling point was reached. Fish were frequently eaten raw; for future use they were dried. Sometimes fish and meat were cooked in a frying or baking pan made of a flat stone.

At times hot springs of volcanic origin were used for cooking food. In 1760-64, a Russian trader noted in his diary: "Large springs of boiling water are found on many islands. In these springs the people bathe and also cook in plaited grass bags the meat of sea-animals, fish, and edible roots, though generally they eat their food raw."

## **Weapons and Defense for War - - -**

Aleut weapons used in war were the bow and arrow, the spear and spear-thrower, the lance, and bone or wooden clubs (Plate 2). Defense against such weapons was achieved by means of slat, rod, or plate armor made of wood (Plate 8). Pincers made of albatross beaks were used to remove spears and arrows from wounds.

## **Travel and Transportation - - -**

Because of the relatively mild climate, the Aleut could not use the Eskimo dog sled or the Indian toboggan and snowshoes. His only means of travel was by skin boats. Of these there were two kinds, the kayak and the umiak,





Fig. 5. Aleut bird-hunter throwing bird spear by means of a spear-thrower. Above him is a bird spear in flight.

both well-known Eskimo types. The kayak (p. 7) was used mostly for hunting at sea.

The umiak consisted of a large wooden frame about thirty feet long and nine feet wide, covered with skins. Twenty people or an equivalent amount of freight could be carried in the Aleut umiak. These large open boats would have been ideal transports for war parties, and it is not hard to imagine a body of attacking Aleut in an umiak being convoyed by lone warriors in their swift kayaks.

### Tools and Utensils - - -

Aleut houses were heated with stone lamps (Fig. 1, *b d*) that burned sea-mammal oil by means of a grass or moss wick. The Aleut also warmed themselves by sitting over small stone lamps with their outer garment spread funnel-wise to receive the heat. Fuel oil was stored or carried in skin or gut bladders equipped with bone spigots and stoppers.

Fire was made by means of a bow-drill (Fig. 1, *e*), or by striking together two pieces of quartz rock that had been rubbed with sulphur. The rubbing produced sparks that ignited the sulphur, which in turn kindled the tinder made of dry grass and feathers. Grass and driftwood were generally used as fuel, but some of the Aleut on the mainland burned coal (lignite).

Household utensils were bone or wooden bowls, spoons, and boxes made of thin wood, bent into shape and sewed at the seams. Drinking water was carried or stored in bladders made of seal skin or the stomachs of sea mammals. These water bags had a bone or ivory spigot and a stopper.

Like the northern Eskimo, Aleut women used a semi-lunar knife of rubbed stone (Plate 6, Fig. 1). A somewhat similar, but rectanguloid, knife was used by men. Another style of knife, also used by men, was made of chipped stone, pointed and double-edged (Plate 6, Fig. 6). Projectile points or blades for lances, harpoons, and darts

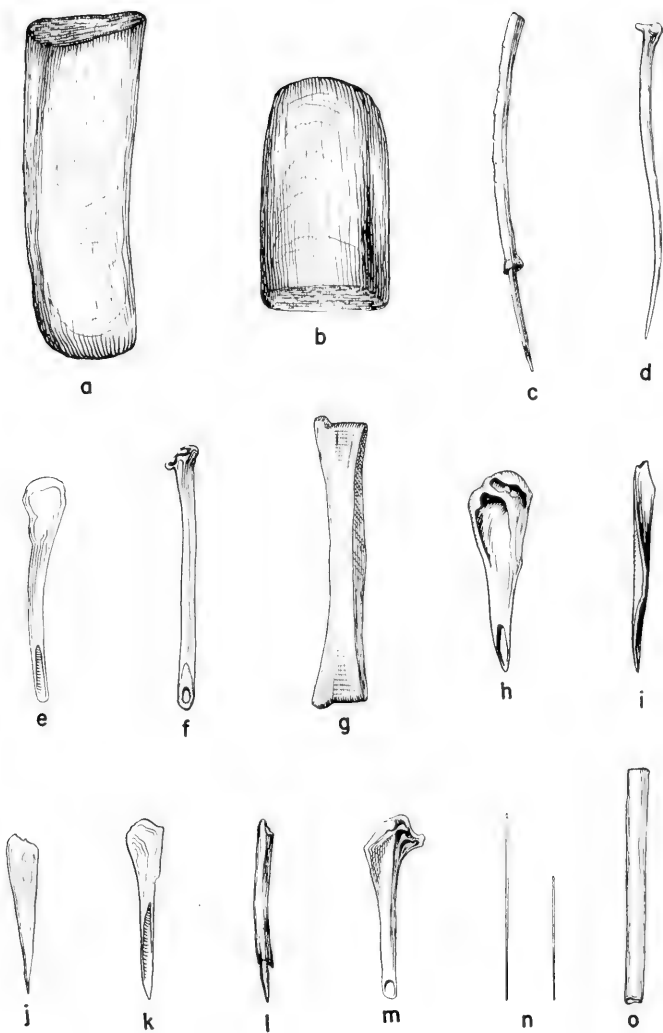


Fig. 6. Bone tools: a-b, Wedges for splitting logs. c, d, h-l, Various styles of awls. e, f, m, Chisels. g, Net-spacer. n, Needles. o, Needle case made of hollow section of bone.

were made of chipped stone (Plate 6, Figs. 7 9, 12 17). Generally these points were hafted to different styles of bone heads for harpoons, lances, and darts. In Plate 5 are illustrated some bone heads for projectiles: large and small harpoon heads (Plate 5, Figs. 1, 4, 9 13); toggle heads for harpoons (Plate 5, Figs. 5 7); a center prong for a fish or bird spear (Plate 5, Fig. 3); a side prong for a fish or bird spear (Plate 5, Fig. 8); a lance head (Plate 5, Fig. 2); and a point for a fish spear (Plate 5, Fig. 14).

The women prepared skins with knives and scrapers made of chipped stone (Plate 6, Figs. 10, 11) and sewed skin clothing, bags, boat coverings, and the like with bone awls and needles (Fig. 6, *c, d, h l*) and sinew thread. Aleut needles (Fig. 6, *n*) did not have eyes. Instead, there was a tiny groove in the head of the needle to which the thread was tied. When not in use, needles were kept in cases, usually made of hollow bone (Fig. 6, *o*).

For wood-working there were several styles of chipped stone scrapers, some of which had stems that could be hafted to a bone or wooden handle (Plate 6, Figs. 3, 4). Wood was chopped with bone or stone adzes (Plate 6, Figs. 2, 18). The latter, however, were extremely rare. Logs of driftwood were split by means of bone wedges (Fig. 6, *a, b*) and wooden mauls or hammerstones. Wood was also shaped with stone knives and bone chisels (Fig. 6, *e, f, m*). Drill points of chipped or rubbed stone were probably used in bow-drills.

Stone-graving tools (Plate 6, Fig. 5) were sometimes fastened to small handles of bone (Fig. 8, *m*). Various tools of bone were used for flaking and chipping stone implements. Hard rocks were used for grinding and pecking stone lamps into their finished form. Bone or wooden shovels were used for excavating the pits that formed the underground part of Aleut houses. Short digging-sticks of bone or wood were used by Aleut women in securing edible roots.

Cradles or carriers for babies were made of a wooden frame to which was lashed animal hide or woven matting.

For carrying boxes, bags, and some kinds of baskets, there were bone handles somewhat suggestive of the type used on our modern traveling bags.

The Aleut solved the problem of itching backs with their back scratcher, a wooden or bone handle to which was fastened a roughened bone head or a bone tip with short teeth something like a comb. It was shoved along the back under the clothing. Combs were made of bone or wood. Some of these were decorated with characteristic Aleut ornamentation (p. 26).

Bone sucking-tubes were sometimes used for pumping water from the kayaks, but there were probably other uses for such objects. A bone implement, probably used in making nets, is shown in Figure 6, *g*. Mortars and grinding stones were used for powdering the minerals used in the manufacture of paint.

### **Pottery - - -**

The Aleut used little pottery, despite the presence of suitable clays. They occasionally made pottery lamps and vessels, very thick and crude pieces heavily tempered with gravel and particles of rock. Sometimes they added clay sides to the flat stones used for frying fish and meat.

### **Basketry - - -**

Basket- and mat-weaving were important occupations of Aleut women, who utilized for this purpose the abundant wild grasses. The weaving, done entirely by hand (Plate 3), consisted of variations of the twining technique: two weft elements, one under and one over each warp element, twisted together between the warp elements. The baskets were decorated with grasses dried to vary in color from green to light yellow or dyed other colors, such as red.

Baskets were used for storage, for carrying, and for cooking. Grass mats were used for a variety of purposes—to sleep on, to sit on, and as screens to partition the interior of the house.

## Dress and Adornment - - -

Both men and women wore long parkas, shirtlike garments made of sea-mammal skins or of bird skins sewed together so that the feathers were inside (Plates 2, 4). As an outer garment, the men wore a similar but longer parka made of sea-mammal intestines sewed together in horizontal strips (Figs. 3, 5). These water-proof garments usually were ornamented along the seams with painted seal-hair or red feathers from the rosy finch. A hood was attached to the parka.

Seal-skin boots were worn by both men and women (Plates 2, 4), but sometimes the Aleut went barefoot. Sketches by Levashev (1768), Webber (1778), and Choris (1820) all show barefooted men or women.

One of the first descriptions of Aleut clothing is in Steller's journal. He says (Golder, 1925, p. 96): "All had on whale-gut shirts with sleeves, very neatly sewed together, which reach to the calf of the leg. Some had the shirts tied below the navel with a string, but others wore them loose. Two of them had on boots and trousers which seemed to be made after the fashion of the Kamchadals out of seal leather and dyed brownish-red with alder bark."

The boots may have been dyed, although some tanned boots with the seal hair removed are brownish-red in color.

The Aleut had three styles of wooden hats. Describing one style, seen in 1741, Steller says (Golder, 1925, p. 102): "On their heads they had hats made of the bark of trees, colored green and red, that resembled in shape the eye shades that are usually worn around the head; the crown was uncovered, and these hats appeared to have been invented only for the purpose of shading the eyes from the sun."

These visor-like hats were worn by male commoners. Another style of hat, one of which was illustrated by Levashev, belongs to a type intermediate between the

Aleut visor and the conical hat. It is like a conical hat with the top cut off (Plate 8).

Of all Aleut headgear, the conical hats were the finest (Fig. 7). Such hats were made from a thin board, bent into shape and sewed with a sinew at the single seam in back. This seam was covered with a bone plate. The

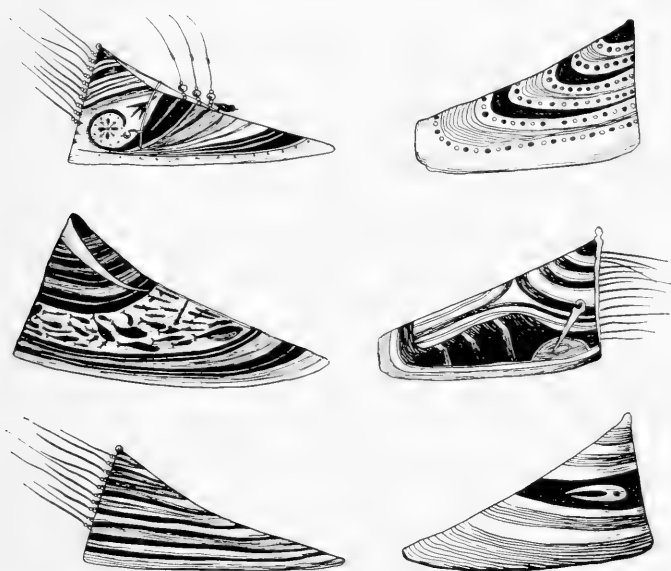


Fig. 7. Wooden hats showing various styles of painted decoration (after Ivanov with modifications).

hats were richly ornamented with ivory or bone carvings, sea-lion whiskers, feathers, and painted designs. Mineral colors used in painting were white, green, red, yellow, black, and blue. The carvings were realistic representations usually of animals or purely geometric designs engraved on bone or ivory plates. Such headgear was very costly and was worn primarily by chiefs or "nobles." These hats were worth from one to three slaves, a high price when one considers that a skin boat cost only one slave.

Wooden hats and visors were worn by hunters. In addition to their aesthetic and prestige value, these hats and visors were believed to have supernatural power that aided the hunter.

Another style of hat was made of bird skins with the feathers attached. Naturally bright and colorful, bird-skin hats were worn by both men and women (Plates 2, 4). They also wore fur hats made of sea-lion skins.

In common with the ancient Mexicans and most Pacific coast Indians and Eskimos, the Aleut wore stone, ivory, or bone labrets (Fig. 8, *g*, *j*, *k*). Steller observed some of these and remarked as follows (Golder, 1925, p. 103):

"I noticed on this occasion once more that these people regard it as a special ornament to pierce holes anywhere in their faces, as we do in the lobes of the ear, and to insert in them various stones and bones. One of these fellows had stuck a slate pencil, about 2½ inches long and exactly like those with which we write on ciphering slates, through the nasal septum. Another had a piece of bone three inches long stuck through crosswise above the chin just under the lower lip. Still another had a bone like it fastened in the forehead, and another, finally, had a similar one in each of the wings of the nose."

In some instances, bunches of grass were inserted in the pierced openings instead of labrets. Frequently grass was stuffed into the nostrils, perhaps for decorative purposes. Bone pins (Fig. 8, *c*) were inserted through a hole in the nasal septum.

Aleut men decorated their faces with blue, red, or white paint. Women were tattooed on their faces, backs, breasts, arms, and sides, in blue or black. The tattooing designs were simple and linear; usually there were closely spaced vertical or radiating lines on the chin and horizontal lines on the face. The lines were usually pricked into the skin with a bone needle. There was another technique also in use in which pigmented thread was sewed into the skin. Both men and women wore



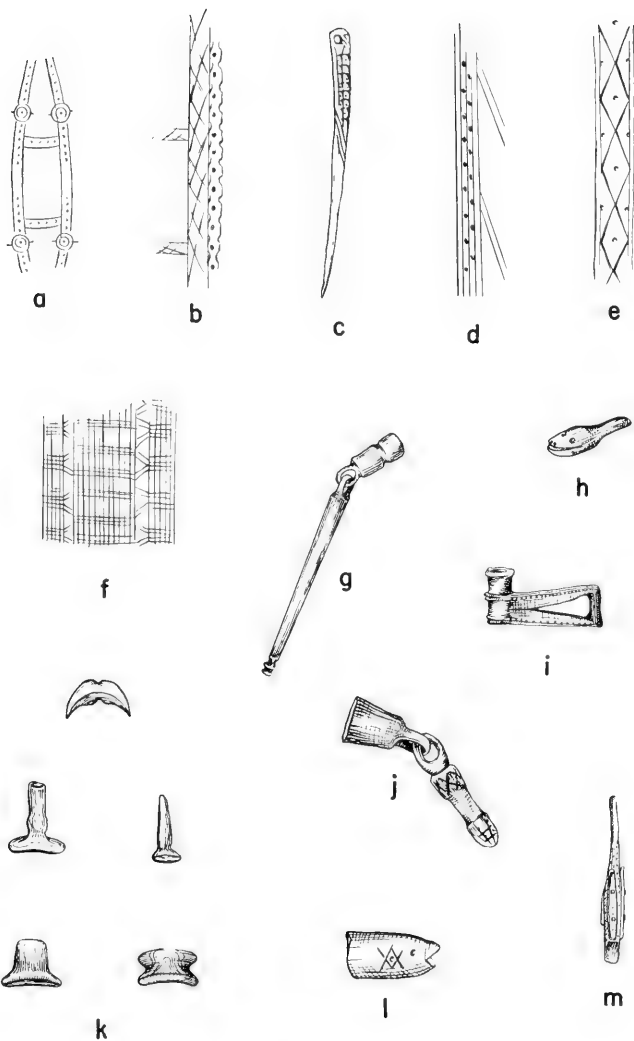


Fig. 8. Aleut art: a, b, d-f, Engraved designs. c, Decorated nose pin. g, j, k, Labrets. h, l, Amulets or ornaments. i, Mouthpiece for harpoon bladder. m, Bone handle for graver.

seal-skin bracelets around their wrists and ankles, and ornamental fringes were attached to their garments.

### Art - - -

There were three types of Aleut art: graphic arts, painting, and sculpture. The graphic arts were represented by engraving and tattooing. Engraving was done on bone or ivory with a sharp-pointed stone graver; tattooing was done with a bone needle and mineral pigments such as red ocher or lamp soot.

The patterns used in tattooing were very simple, usually composed of straight lines. Engraved designs (Fig. 8, *a, b, d f*) were simple geometric patterns usually made of straight lines, although the circle and the circle and dot were common enough motifs (Fig. 8, *a*). These designs were generally placed on weapons and ornaments. Related to engraving was the technique of making designs by means of shallow drilled holes (Fig. 8, *m*). Such work was usually confined to the decoration of bone ornaments, but was used occasionally on bone tools.

The Aleut were very fond of red. Using red mineral paint, they covered solidly the shafts of their darts, spears, harpoons, and arrows. Polychrome painting was commonly used in the decoration of wooden hunting-hats and eye shades and ceremonial masks. The motifs were both geometric and realistic (Fig. 7). In some of the geometric motifs on wooden hats there is a use of sweeping curvilinear lines.

Facial painting was probably an elaborate procedure with a variety of motifs, but about the only early record is that of Steller, who saw an Aleut paint pear-shaped designs on his cheeks.

Aleut sculpture was carved in wood, bone, and ivory. Such carving was naturalistic in so far as real or imaginary creatures were represented. Sculptured objects in this category were wooden masks (which were also painted; Fig. 9), faces carved on bone lance and dart heads, amulets, and ornaments (Fig. 8, *h, l*). A type of sculpture



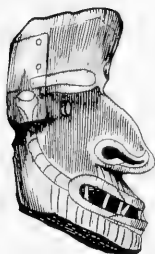
a



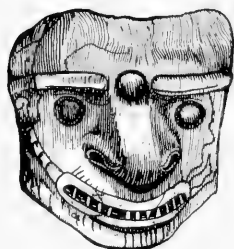
b



c



d



e



f



g



h

Fig. 9. Wooden masks used in Aleut ceremonies (after Dall).

closely related to engraving was also used in the ornamentation of dart and lance heads. This sculptural variant consisted of raised lines with rows of notches cut into them, and other similar geometric forms. The designs were simple, linear, and rigid (Fig. 8, *i*).

Aleut art seems to have been stiff and formal for the most part. The graceful curving lines painted on some of the hats illustrated by Ivanov may have been the result of Russian influence.

### **Aleut Society - - -**

The social organization of the Aleut was somewhat more complicated than that of the Eskimo. Each island or small group of islands had a ruling man referred to by the Russians as an "elder."

There were four social classes: elders, chiefs, commoners, and slaves. We do not know how elders, chiefs, and commoners obtained their status; the slaves were Aleut who had been captured in wars between islands. Possibly the chiefs ruled over villages or perhaps they were in charge of honored occupational groups, such as whale hunters. Another possibility is that the chiefs obtained their rank in society by bravery and efficiency in warfare.

The Aleut--elders, chiefs, commoners, and slaves--lived in villages. Usually each village consisted of a group of family houses and a large community center, the *kashim*, which seems to have been primarily a type of men's house. This house was the village meeting place, workshop, and ceremonial center. Some villages had large communal houses in which a number of families lived, others had smaller dwellings that housed single families.

### **Marriage - - -**

The Aleut were polygamous. A man had several wives, probably as many as he could support by hunting

and fishing. Conversely, a woman could have as many husbands as she could keep house for.

One form of marriage was by capture, but there were apparently less violent methods of acquiring a wife. Bancroft (1886, p. 92) describes what seems to be marriage by purchase. Presents were made to the relatives of the bride. But even under such peaceful conditions of marriage there sometimes was a mock abduction in which the groom pretended that he was seizing the bride by force.

The Aleut allowed a man to take as additional wives the younger sisters of his wife. Another old Aleut custom permitted the younger unmarried brothers of the husband to cohabit with his wives. Apparently this privilege was extended to male parallel cousins (children of father's brother or mother's sister), who were regarded as brothers by the Aleut.

### Household - - -

With this complexity of marital ties and privileges it was possible for Aleut households to become considerably enlarged. In such an enlarged household, a man's sons did not live with him but with their mother's brother (maternal uncle). Thus a woman's sons lived in their uncle's household and were educated by him. Such a custom is not at all rare among primitive peoples.

What happened to the daughters of a husband and wife is not revealed by the records of the early Russian explorers and traders. Perhaps they too were brought up in the mother's brother's household.

### Kinship - - -

The complicated nature of Aleut society was reflected in its kinship system, which resembled that of some Indians more than it did that of the Eskimo to whom Aleut were more clearly related in other respects. The Aleut placed within the same or nearly similar categories

certain relatives that we always keep separate. For instance, the father and the father's brother were nearly equivalent, as were the mother and the mother's sister. But the mother's brother and the father's sister were each placed in a separate category somewhat similar to our "uncle" and "aunt." The Aleut uncle was very important, for it was he who brought up his sister's sons.

Parallel cousins (children of the father's brother or the mother's sister) were reckoned as the equivalent of brothers and sisters. An Aleut could not, of course, marry his female parallel cousin. Cross cousins (children of the father's sister or the mother's brother) were considered as cousins rather than brothers and sisters. Probably he could marry his cross cousin; it is even possible that at one time cross-cousin marriage was preferential.

### Property - - -

Although the evidence is far from clear, it appears that each Aleut village or island owned certain hunting and fishing territories; possibly such territories were divided among Aleut households. Villages also held rights to sources of mineral paints.

Nothing is known about the inheritance of property, but considering the few facts that are known about Aleut social organization, there is some probability that nephews inherited from their uncles (mother's brothers) rather than from their fathers. In view of the uncle-nephew relationship, Bancroft's statement (1886, p. 90) that the status and rôle of whale hunters passed from father to son is probably not accurate. It is more probable that the rights and privileges of the whale-hunting caste passed from uncle to nephew.

### Education of Children - - -

Like the children of most primitive peoples, Aleut children learned what was expected of them by observing their elders and playing games in which they assumed

the rôle of adults. Indirectly, children were allowed to participate in or observe most activities of adults. Thus, children learned morals, ethics, religion, history, how to secure food and shelter, and in general how to live as an Aleut among other Aleut.

Punishment was rare. Almost the only type known, and one common to all Eskimos, consisted of plunging a crying infant into snow or cold water. Bancroft says (1886, p. 92) that "this remedy, performed in winter amid broken ice, is very effectual."

Upon reaching a certain age, boys were turned over to their uncles, who taught them hunting, warfare, and other things expected of an Aleut man. Young girls learned to cook, sew, and care for babies, and to participate in other social activities expected of women.

### Names - - -

Aleut names were romantic and colorful. Some of those recorded by Jochelson are as follows: The Producer of Daylight; The Breaker of Walrus Tusks; My Moon; The Fear Inspiring; The Seaweed; The One Who Is Always Lying; The Root; The One Who Is Waiting for His Dart; The Shark; The Sea Lion's Hair; The Splitter (of drift logs); and The Quickly Speaking Person.

### Games - - -

Aleut games were for the amusement of adults as well as children. Like the Eskimo, the Aleut had innumerable varieties of "cat's cradle," which was primarily a woman's game. Among some of the Aleut this game was not played in summer, for they believed if they did, that a cold autumn would follow. Another game was blanket-tossing. This too was a common Eskimo form of amusement. Other games were the ring and pin, where a tossed ring must be caught on a stick; a variant of the cup and pin game, in which a board with holes in it must be caught on a stick; and several juggling games.

## Ceremonies - - -

Aleut ceremonies were primarily a reflection of religious beliefs and secondarily a manifestation of ideas of propriety. Comparatively little is known about them, but from Steller's journal (Golder, 1925, p. 92) we have the following account of a first meeting between the Russians and the Aleut:

"... one of them came very near to us, but, before approaching quite close, he reached into his bosom, pulled out some iron- or lead-colored shiny earth, and with this he painted himself from the wings of the nose across the cheeks in the form of two pears, stuffed the nostrils full of grass (the nose wings on each side, however, were pierced with fine pieces of bone), and then took from the sticks lying behind him on the skin boat one which was like a billiard cue, about three ells [6 ft.] long, of spruce wood and painted red, placed two falcon wings on it and tied them fast with whalebone, showed it to us, and then with a laugh threw it towards our vessel into the water. I cannot tell whether it was meant as a sacrifice or a sign of good friendship. On our part we tied two Chinese tobacco pipes and some glass beads to a piece of board and tossed it to him. He picked it up, looked at it a little, and then brought it over to his companion, who placed it on top of his boat. After this he became somewhat more courageous, approached still nearer to us, though with the greatest caution, tied an eviscerated entire falcon to another stick and passed it up to our Koryak interpreter in order to receive from us a piece of Chinese silk and a mirror. It was not at all his intention that we should keep the bird but that we should place the piece of silk between the claws so that it would not become wet."

The behavior of the Aleut suggests that they either considered the Russians as supernatural beings or else had a ceremonious way of greeting strangers.

Additional information about the ceremonial treatment of strangers has been gathered by Bancroft, who says (1886, p. 93): "The stranger guest, as he approaches



the village, is met by dancing men and dancing women who conduct him to the house of the host, where food is given him. After supper, the dancing, now performed by naked men, continues until all are exhausted . . . and all retire." Wives or slaves were lent to the guests as part of the hospitality. Wife-lending is a common custom among most Eskimos.

Music for dances was supplied by drums, rattles, and vocal chants. The Aleut drum, like that of the Eskimo, was single-headed and consisted of a narrow hoop over which was stretched a membrane. The drum, held by strings, was beaten so that the drumstick struck the rim before hitting the membrane. Some of the drums were equipped with wooden or bone handles instead of strings. Some of the rattles were made of birds' beaks, others probably of wood or skin.

Aleut dances were dramatic presentations for social and religious occasions. Bancroft says (1886, p. 93): "They are fond of pantomimic performances; of representing in dances their myths and legends; of acting out a chase, one assuming the part of a hunter, another of a bird or beast trying to escape the snare, now succeeding, now failing—the piece ending in the transformation of a captive bird into a lovely woman who falls exhausted into the arms of the hunter."

The most important Aleut ceremony was the winter festival held each year for the purpose of insuring good hunting in the spring. The festival lasted an unknown number of days and was in part celebrated by dances in which the dancers wore carved wooden masks painted in many colors. These masks were representations of spirits of animals and of supernatural beings who lived in the ocean, the earth, or the sky. After the ceremony they were destroyed. There were also large painted and carved figures, presumably representations of gods, although exactly how these were used is not known.

One feature of the winter festival consisted of a dance, in which, according to Bancroft, ". . . the women of the

village assembled by moonlight, and danced naked with masked faces, the men being excluded under penalty of death." There were similar dances in which the men participated.

## War - - -

To quote the somewhat ambiguous statement of Bancroft (1886, p. 91): "Notwithstanding their peaceful character, the occupants of the several islands were almost constantly at war." The Aleut engaged in war for a number of reasons. Frequent causes were disputes over property, and these were of several kinds. For one thing, each village had hunting and fishing rights to certain territories and the violation of these rights by Aleut from other villages or islands was cause for war. Similarly, sources of mineral paint were owned by specific villages. If Aleut from another village took mineral paints from such sources, war resulted. The capture of brides from other islands was also the signal for combat. Another cause was the raiding of villages for the purpose of obtaining slaves.

A less tangible reason for war was the necessity for Aleut men to obtain honor and power as warriors. Touching the internal secretions of a fallen enemy was thought to bring an Aleut honor and supernatural power, and so possibly when such commodities were running low in a village, war was declared.

Blood feuds and revenge were almost endless sources of conflict. If a woman was captured by a wife-hunter or a person was injured in some way, all of the relatives and friends of the injured person would seek to kill or injure the aggressor, who presumably would be from another village. Then the friends and relatives of the aggressor would have to obtain revenge for his injury, and thus would be set in motion an endless chain of wars.

The head of a slain enemy was secured as a trophy and displayed on top of a pole in front of the victor's house.

## Religion - - -

The Aleut believed in spirits and supernatural beings whose power was ever present in all things, from rocks to animals. One class of deities ruled over the sea, another the earth, and still another the sky. These deities were very important to the Aleut because they could provide good hunting, protection from enemies, and the like. In short, these supernatural beings could fill all of the needs of Aleut society. However, they helped only those Aleut who helped themselves.

Like the northern Eskimo, the Aleut were careful to keep separate those things which belonged to the land gods and those things which belonged to the sea gods. For example, if it became necessary for a hunter to lighten the rock-ballast in his kayak, he could not throw the rocks into the sea, because such an act would make the sea gods angry; he had to return them to the land. Likewise, the bones of the first sea-mammal killed by a hunting party had to be thrown back into the sea, although the flensing of the animal and the removal of the bones could take place on shore.

The ocean gods and other spirits assisted the Aleut sea-faring hunter, but the hunter and Aleut society as a whole had to undertake certain ceremonies and rituals in order to please them and insure their continued support.

The winter festival, for instance—a ceremony in which the whole village participated—was performed, at least in part, for the purpose of obtaining a plentiful food supply from the gods. Doubtless other rites were performed by individual hunters. Additional help in hunting could be obtained from the spirits of dead relatives, from one's animal protector, or from the supernatural power lodged in the carvings and painted designs on the wooden headgear or in amulets. Some hunting amulets listed by Jochelson were as follows: The feathers of the rosy finch were an amulet used in whale hunting, and pieces of hematite were amulets for hunting sea otters and whales. Other amulets were ravens' beaks and carved bone

figures of different animals. A rather complicated amulet used by eastern Aleut fox hunters consisted of a small rope made from the long neck hair of a male reindeer, the sinew of a fox tail, and stems of a strawberry plant soaked in urine. This was wrapped in a piece of skin or gut.

There were a number of things a hunter could not do without inviting disaster. He must not allow anyone to see his amulets, and before a hunting trip he had to avoid contact with women, especially widows and menstruating women.

Sickness and death were caused by evil spirits. Sometimes death could be prevented or sickness could be cured by shamans, specialists who could use their supernatural power against the evil spirits of sickness and death. Only shamans could make the sacred masks used in Aleut rituals.

In contrast to the northern Eskimo, Aleut did not fear the dead. Spirits of dead relatives were helpful in many ways. Also, spirits of dead Aleut could reside in animals; for instance, sea otters could have human souls.

The Aleut religion took care of the needs of the people it served and was well integrated with the other aspects of Aleut society.

## Mythology - - -

The myths and stories of the Aleut were of three kinds. The first class dealt with animal protectors, guardians, and other supernatural beings. The second kind of myth told of the deeds of culture-heroes, warriors, strong men, and chiefs. The third style of story was historical, telling of the present or past life of the Aleut.

The narration of myths was an art, and a narrator was proud of his skill. His fellow villagers also took pride in his skill and expected him to maintain a high standard of excellence. As Jochelson stated, the narration of a myth was regarded as the "common work of the tribe expressed by individuals." Stories were prefaced with the statement that this is "the work or creation of my country."

## Disposal of the Dead - - -

The northern Eskimo feared the dead and disposed of bodies as quickly as possible. The Aleut, on the other hand, had no such fear. In fact, family attachments were so great that parting with the dead was delayed as long as possible. Undoubtedly there were various ritualistic observances in the period between death and disposal of the body. We know, for instance, that there were processions marked by the beating of drums and the wailing of the bereaved and that labrets were removed as a sign of mourning. When at length the time arrived for the removal of the body, it was disposed of in one of three ways: cremation, burial in the ground, or burial in caves.

Cremation seems to have been the mark of a low status in society, for cremated cave burials were mostly of women, children, and slaves, probably associates of some great personage or chief who was the central theme of the particular burial. Interments were made in circular pits which were regarded by the living as houses for the dead. A number of individuals could be buried in the same pit along with grave offerings. Preparation for such burials is said to have been the same as for cave burials.

Still another funeral custom of the Aleut was burial in a tomb or sarcophagus made of logs and planks. These underground tombs were rectangular, about eight feet wide, ten feet long, and three feet high. The sides and ends were made of logs, but the top of the crypt was covered by planks caulked with pieces of fur and neatly tied bundles, also of fur. The bodies inside the crypt were in flexed positions and accompanied by their clothing, tools, ornaments, and other belongings.

The most interesting and spectacular burials were the mummy packs, deposited in caves. For this interment, the viscera sometimes were removed and the space left by such removal was filled with grass; in other cases there was no such evisceration. The body, dressed in a parka of bird skins or sea-otter fur, over which (in the case of men) there might be a waterproof parka, was placed in a

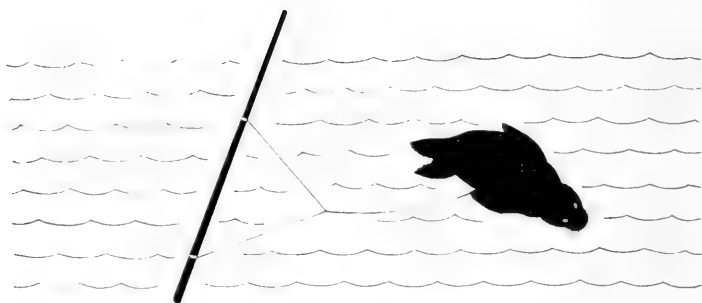
sitting position with arms and legs drawn tightly against the torso, and was wrapped in woven mats. Then the mummy pack was tied with cords or nets and perhaps more matting. Finally it was removed to a dry cave where it was placed amid a lavish display of burial furniture. Women, for instance, were surrounded by their sewing equipment and cooking utensils. Babies were in their cradles. Hunters had all their weapons and kayaks with them. Warriors were dressed in armor, with their weapons at hand. Thus it can be seen that cave burials were communities of the dead completely equipped to live in a spirit world in much the same way as they had lived before death. Some Aleut believed that at night the dead went about their tasks of hunting and house-keeping, that they held their festivals and ceremonies, but that with the arrival of daylight they returned to their cave resting-places and assumed their burial positions.

There were two types of cave burial. Chiefs with their retinue and honored persons such as some warriors and whale hunters, were placed in large grotto-like caves, where the mummies were suspended from wooden frames or laid upon a wooden platform. Smaller caves served as village cemeteries where the dead were placed upon the bare floor of the cave or upon mats. All of the caves were dry and relatively warm, an important factor in accounting for the excellent preservation of mummies.



## Decline of the Aleut

This survey of the Aleut, at about 1740, the time of their first contact with the white men, shows them well adapted to their environment and possessing a relatively advanced culture. In the early period of Russian exploitation many Aleut were brutally exterminated. Even in the years when the white masters of the land offered kinder treatment, Aleut culture could not stand up against the impact of a foreign civilization. Consequently, they lost everything important to them and received little in return. Recent efforts of the United States government have succeeded in improving the lot of the Aleut, but at present, after two hundred years of white contact, Aleut culture is completely broken and almost extinct.



## Archaeology of the Aleut

Aleut culture of the Early period was fundamentally similar to that of the Late period, which I have just described. Undoubtedly there were numerous stylistic differences between the two periods, but these are as yet unrevealed. W. H. Dall, the first archaeologist to make excavations in the Aleutians, thought that there were three radically different stages of Aleut development. Later excavations by W. I. Jochelson showed that Dall's conclusions were faulty and based upon insufficient evidence. Jochelson, in fact, reached the conclusion that there were no important differences between the earliest and latest Aleut. A true perspective of Aleut archaeology lies somewhere in between these two extremes. The available evidence indicates that there are some differences between the Early and Late periods of Aleut culture. Probably future stratigraphic investigations will add to the number of differences.



## People - - -

According to A. Hrdlicka, the Aleut of the Early period (Pre-Aleut, he calls them) were of a different physical type than the later population. These early Aleut had longer and higher skulls and their features were more delicate. They somewhat resembled northern Eskimos as well as some Indians in British Columbia and California. They were, however, quite different from modern Aleut. It is not known if the later population is the result of an alien people invading the Aleutians. Whatever the case may be, it is certain that at one time both physical types were together on the Aleutian Islands and possessed a typically Aleut culture.

## Conjectures - - -

The ingredients of Aleut culture are Eskimo, Indian, and Siberian in character. In varying proportions it is similar to that of Alaskan Eskimos, both northern and southern; interior Indians from Alaska to Washington; Northwest Coast Indians; and natives of Kamchatka in Siberia. A hypothetical reconstruction of Aleut pre-history is as follows:

The Aleut were an Eskimo-speaking, hunting people who left Asia at the end of the Siberian Paleolithic stage about 2,000 or more years ago. Like many other immigrants before them, the ancient Aleut crossed into America at Bering Strait; and also, like some of the previous immigrants who spoke Indian languages, the early Aleut were carriers of a circumpolar and perhaps circumboreal hunting culture indigenous to the Old World.

The Aleut worked their way southward until they eventually were stopped by the pressure of Indians of a similar culture who occupied the coast and the interior from a point south of Alaska down through British Columbia. The ancient Aleut therefore moved into the Alaska Peninsula and then to the Aleutian Islands, where they gradually adapted themselves to their new environ-

ment. This was not hard to do, because their ancestral hunting culture could be adapted to hunting on sea or on land according to necessity.

In the course of time, new Eskimo groups drove a wedge between the Aleut and their Indian neighbors. The newcomers took over the greater portion of the Alaska Peninsula and occupied the coasts and islands both north and south. Confined for the most part to their island homeland, the Aleut became excellent hunters and navigators. With their skin-covered boats they made trips to the Siberian mainland at Kamchatka. It is possible that the change in Aleut physical type was brought about by intermarriage with natives of Kamchatka.

While the Aleut were maintaining trade and commerce with Kamchatka, they also were in contact with their southern Eskimo neighbors and from them were receiving Eskimo and Indian influences. Some time in the Late period the southern Eskimo and the Aleut were profoundly influenced by the Northwest Coast Indians, whose culture was in part a spectacular development out of the old hunting culture stratum which had blocked the southward movement of the ancient Aleut.

The geographical position of the Aleut made them the middlemen in the distribution of Asiatic and American culture traits along the north Pacific shores of Asia and America. Although the Eskimos at Bering Strait were similarly engaged, the two trading systems seem to have been independent.

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ALEUT HUNTER WITH SINEW-BACKED BOW

Costume probably that worn by the mainland Aleut



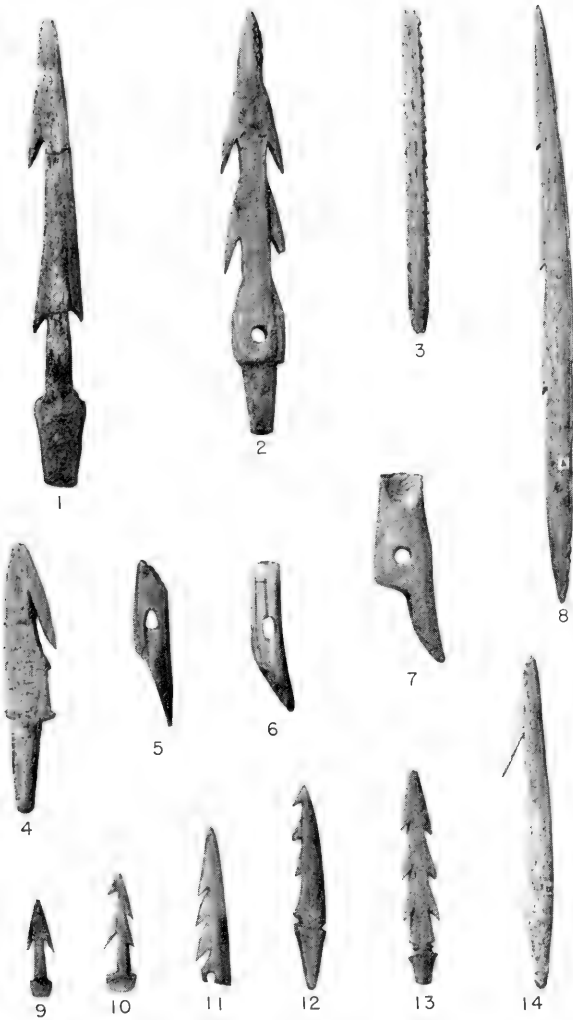
ALEUT WITH WOODEN CLUB



ALEUT WOMAN WEAVING GRASS BASKETS

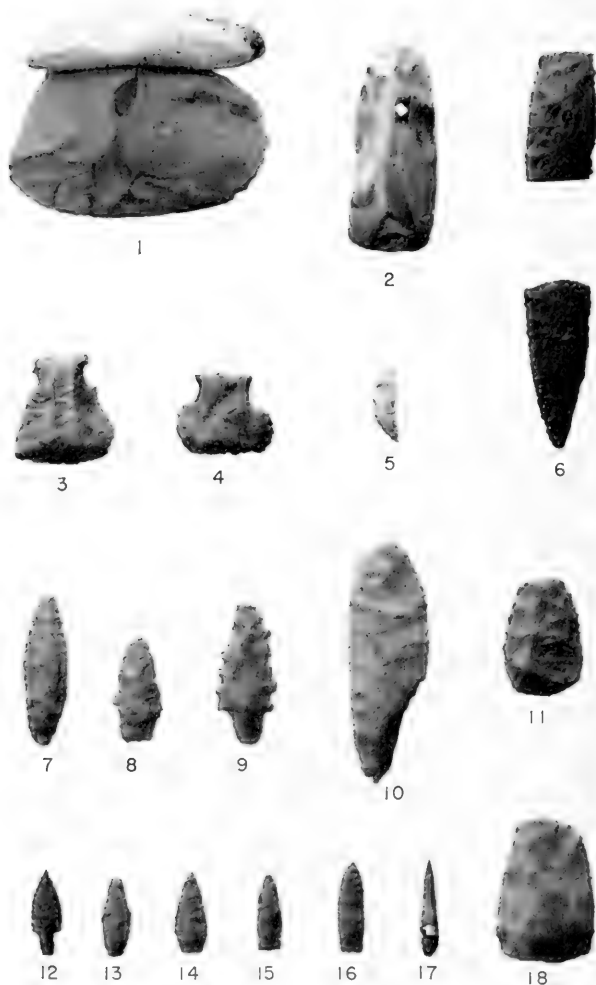


ALEUT WOMAN



# HARPOON HEADS AND SPEARHEADS OF BONE

Figs. 1, 4, 9-13, Barbed harpoon heads. Fig. 2, Spear or lance head.  
 Fig. 3, A center prong for a fish or bird spear. Figs. 5-7, Toggle  
 heads for harpoons. Fig. 8, A side prong for a fish or bird spear.  
 Fig. 14, A point for a single-headed fish spear.



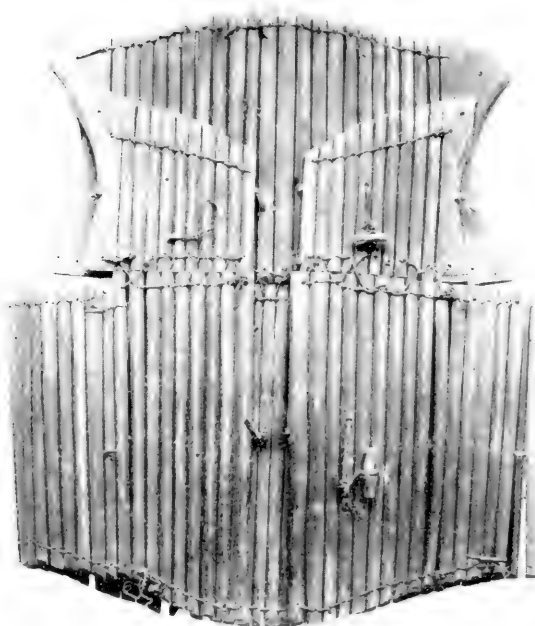
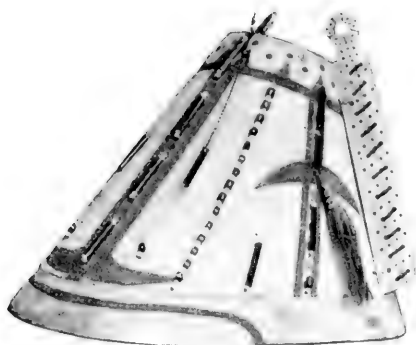
# TOOLS AND WEAPON POINTS OF STONE

Fig. 1, Woman's knife (ulu) with bone handle. Figs. 2, 18, Adzes.  
 Figs. 6, 10, Knives. Figs. 3, 4, 11, Scrapers. Fig. 5, Graving tool.  
 Figs. 7-9, 12-17, Projectile points.



MINIATURE SKIN-COVERED CANOES OR KAYAKS, PROBABLY TOYS; MADE BY ALEUT

Bottom picture, courtesy of United States National Museum



#### ARMOR AND WOODEN HAT

Lower: Aleut armor of wooden rods twined together with thongs of skin or sinew. Upper: One of several styles of wooden hats worn by the Aleut and their neighbors. Courtesy of United States National Museum.







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